

Maria Johanna 1784

Archival Research

Ship *Maria Johanna*
Master Pieter Tjallings Bonk
Crew, Cargo & Final Voyage.

Project

Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck

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Introduction

Mid February 1784 the Dutch cargo vessel *Maria Johanna* was on the last leg of her voyage from Amsterdam to Philadelphia. In severe winter conditions the merchant ship laid stuck in ice at the mouth of the River Delaware. A few weeks later an early March storm grounded the vessel on a sandbank. According to reports the *Maria Johanna* “smashed to pieces”; a total loss, most of the crew perished.

Two centuries and one score later a dredger struck an 18th Century shipwreck. A short while later thousands of artefacts washed up on the shores of Lewes, Delaware. Archaeologists of the Delaware Department of State Division (DDoS) of Historical and Cultural Affairs salvaged some 40.000 artefacts. Also private persons donated their finds.

In 2006 DDoS ordered Southeastern Archaeological Research to execute a remote sensing research on the wreck. By then it was known as the *Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck* (RIS). On 16 November 2006 the location of the wreck was included in the National Register of Historic Places.

The original name of the Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck is still not known. Between 1772 and 1800 over 30 ships were wrecked near Lewes. As stated by Southeastern Archaeological Research, there are clues that the RIS very well could be the *Maria Johanna*.

In the Fall of 2019 the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands commissioned Bureau Hak to investigate historic sources in the Netherlands in order to find information about the ship *Maria Johanna*, Master Pieter Tjallings Bonk, the owner(s) of the vessel, crew, cargo and final voyage.

This report contains the results of the archival research in Dutch historic sources.

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Conclusions

1. This research resulted in official proof that the *Maria Johanna* was a Dutch vessel and that the homeport was Amsterdam. More is known about the history of the ship as a Greenland Whaler and after 1779 as a merchant vessel.
2. The fact that the vessel operated as a whaler is also an indication about the built of the vessel. To sail Arctic waters required a strengthened hull and in particular a bow that could stand the pressure of ice. It may not be a decisive factor, but it is interesting to learn whether the remains of the RIS show any proof of a strengthened bow or hull.
3. The vessel *Maria Johanna* measured in today's standards a length of 32.55m. / 106 ft 9", a beam of 8.26m. / 27ft 1", and a draft 3.52m. / 11ft 7".
4. Despite extensive searches in notary archives and the municipal archives of Amsterdam, this research has not been successful in filling the void in information on the cargo of the *Maria Johanna*. One of the survivors was the so-called supercargo, the person on board in charge of the cargo. It could very well be, as common use would have it, that the supercargo has made a formal statement on the last voyage, ship and cargo at a notary's office in Philadelphia. This could benefit the identification of the Roosevelt Inlet Shipwreck.



Image 1. Fluytschip

Maria Johanna

The history of the vessel *Maria Johanna* is rather chequered as the ship had different uses and working areas over the years. In 1767 Master Kemp Driewesz (1729-1795) commanded the whaler *Maria Johanna*. Every year, from 1767 till 1780 he sailed *Maria Johanna* to the waters around Greenland to catch whales. He was rather successful. In the fourteen years he led the hunt “for fish” a total number of 74 whales were caught.¹ In his 26-year career as a whaler commander he caught 110 whales.

Type of ship

The *Maria Johanna* was a type of ship called in the Dutch language a fluit or fluytschip, in English: a flute or fly-boat. The first of this type dates back to the seventeenth century. The ship’s architecture is typical Dutch, West-Frisian to be precise, as its roots lay in the city of Hoorn. The flute had multiple decks and usually three square-rigged masts. The vessel was inexpensive to build, could carry a large cargo, had a small draft good stability and needed only a small crew to handle it. Depending on the use of the vessel the design differed from a Greenland whaler, transporters of sugar or timber, traders for the Baltic or the Dutch East India Company. There was also variation in design over the years and per geographic area.

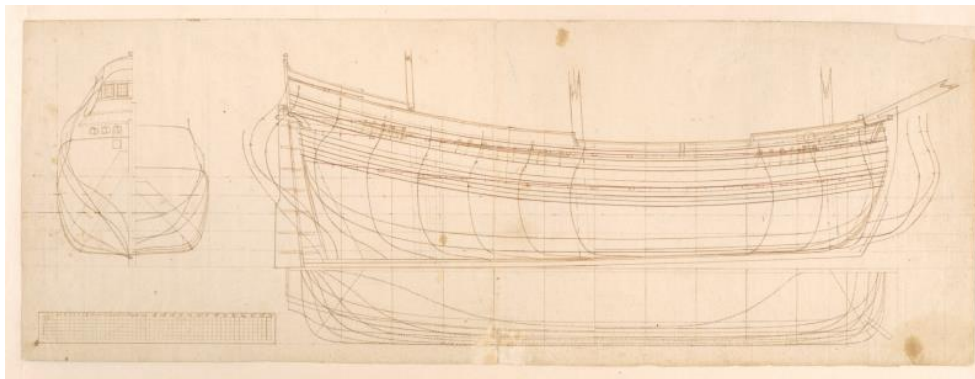


Image 2. Lines plan

In several documents and newspapers the *Maria Johanna* is mentioned as a ‘Groenlants Vaerder’ a ship used for whaling around Greenland. The bow was strengthened in order to stand the pressure of ice. On the aft deck a hoisting installation was mounted to handle the whaling sloops.

It is not known when *Maria Johanna* was build, probably 1765/6. Regarding the time the vessel was at sea and the industry she was in, it is reasonable to assume that the vessel was purpose-built.

¹ <https://forum.amelanders.com/>

On the Rocks

The story of a close to fatal voyage has more information on the *Maria Johanna*. On 27 April 1768 Driewesz sailed from the island of Texel in the North of the Dutch Republic and arrived 'at the ice' near Greenland on 8 May. The months following he managed to catch two whales. In August the *Maria Johanna* grounded in a storm. The ship was almost wrecked, but master Driewesz and his crew managed to get back to open waters and to keep their ship afloat. On 1 October they were back at Texel straits.

The damage report shows the typical features of a Greenland Whaler: a *borstlap* - the strengthened bow (double layered), *ijs-schuurgang* or *dubbelingsgang*; a double layer around the ship to prevent damage by ice. One of the remarks on the damage to the hull was that it was "so severe that the bolts stuck out."²

War

During the American War of Independence (1776-1783), many masters and ordinary seamen left their whale ships and signed up for voyages to the New World. Within a short period of time, this trade proved to be much more lucrative than the whale fishery. Salaries were higher and offered more opportunities to make money on the side through private trade.³

Ship's operator Tamme IJsbrandsz Beth from Amsterdam managed the *Maria Johanna*. He had a shipping company and was also a ship charterer. Overseas trade had made him wealthy and powerful, even in times of war.

Due to the support of the Dutch Republic to the rebellion in the British North American Thirteen Colonies, war broke out in 1781 between Britain and the Low Countries. The hostilities hampered Dutch shipping and whaling increasingly.

Earlier activities of English privateers had such a negative impact on the business of Tamme IJsbrandsz Beth that, when finally war had broken out, he supported a fleet under Rear-Admiral Johan Zoutman. In August 1781 it came to a battle with the British Royal Navy at Doggers Bank on the North Sea. It ended in a draw, with both parties claiming victory.

It stands to reason that while Dutch whaling ceased for a couple of years as a result of the American War of Independence and the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war (1781-1784) ships were sold, laid off or, more likely, converted to merchant vessels.

² <http://forum.amelanders.com>

³ J.C.A. Schokkenbroek, *An Anatomy of Dutch Whaling and Sealing in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1885*, 38.

For sale

According to an advertisement in the newspaper *Amsterdamse courant* of 2 May 1782 the brokers T. Beth Ysbrandsz., H. Beth Tammesz, en J. Beth announced the sale of the *Maria Johanna*.

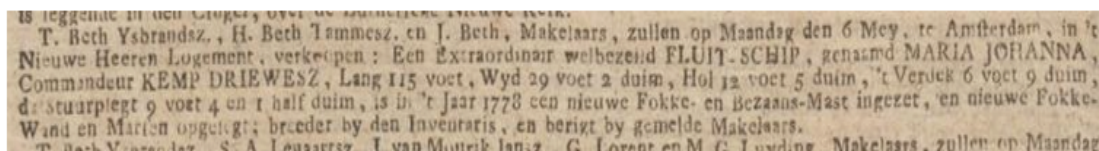


Image 3. Amsterdamse courant, 2 May 1782.

“ T. Beth Ysbrandsz., H. Beth Tammesz, en J. Beth, Makelaars, will, on Monday the 6th of May, in Amsterdam, in ‘t Nieuwe Heeren Logement, put up for sale: a extraordinary well-sailed Flute, by the name of MARIA JOHANNA, Commander KEMP DRIEWESZ, length 115 voet, beam 29 voet 2 duim, draft 12 voet 5 duim, aft deck 6 voet 9 duim, steering deck 9 voet 4 and 1 half duim, in th’ year 1778 a new foremast and mizzen were placed and new fore-shrouds and spars were rigged, more information in the inventory and from the brokers mentioned. “

Table 1. Dimensions of the vessel.

Dutch	English	voet	duim	m	(US)ft	” ⁴
Lang	Length	115	0	32.55	106	9
Wyd	Beam	29	2	8.26	27	1
Hol	Draft	12	5	3.52	11	7
Verdek	stern deck	6	9	1.93	6	4
Stuurplegt	deck steering wheel	9	4 ½	2.66	8	9

Tonnage

The Amsterdam Archives hold the so-called *Zeebrieven* or Sea Letters. These were in fact official declarations by masters that their vessels had their homeport in the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. The Sea Letter was a necessity for a master to obtain a passport in case he wanted to go abroad. The Sea Letter contains the name of the master, the name of the ship and the tonnage of the ship in ‘lasten’⁵. The *Maria Johanna* measured 115 ‘last’ x 3,01 m³ = 346,2 metric tons.⁶ In the newspaper *United States Chronicle*, 8 April 1784, there is a mention of the *Maria Johanna*, with a tonnage of 600 tons.

⁴ Conversion: 1 (Amsterdam) voet = 0.283 meter, 1 voet = 11 duim, 1 duim = 0.02572 meter, 1 foot = 0.3048 m.

⁵ 1 Amsterdam last = 3010,5 litre.

⁶ Municipal Archive – Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief van de Burgemeesters: zeebrieven, Toegangsnummer: 5036, Periode: 1705 – 1787, Inv. Nr 10, A06972000108.

Pieter Tjallings Bonk

Kemp Driewesz was born on the island of Ameland. Although it had a rather small population, a large number of masters of Greenland whalers came from Ameland. And, as it happened, so did Pieter Tjallings Bonk. He was in command of *Maria Johanna* on her last voyage. His date of birth is not known. P.T. Bonk was the only child of Tjelling Pieters Bonk (1722-1806) and Ebelke Jans.⁷ They married on 22 September 1748 in Sloterdijk. T. P. Bonk was master of a merchant vessel.

On 26 August 1778 Pieter Tjallings Bonk married Neeke Douwes (1748-1826) - who was also from Ameland - in Sloterdijk, a town near Amsterdam. Between them they had one child, Douwe Pieters Bonk (1780-1855).⁸

Whaler

Pieter Tjallings Bonk was commander of a whaling ship from 1776 until 1779. His hunting ground was Davis Strait, between mid-western Greenland and Baffin Island, Canada. In this period master Bonk managed to catch 5½ whales. Sometimes the profit of one whale had to be split with the master of another vessel that had supported the catch.

P.T. Bonk commanded several ships whilst in Northern waters: *De Vrouw Margaretha* and *De Hoop op de Nering*.

From 1780 whalers were converted to cargo vessels. Bonk went along with the trend and switched to regular cargo too. According to a report in the newspaper *Noord-Hollandse courant* of 20 November 1780 "*Captain Bonk, on board De Hoop op de Visserij arriving in Amsterdam from Curacao had lost one of the masts.*"

⁷ Of both the place of birth is not known.

⁸ Source: <https://amelanders.com/>

Maria Johanna and Master P.T. Bonk

Damaged goods

Pieter Tjallings Bonk was in command when on 14 July 1782 the *Maria Johanna* sailed from Amsterdam to Archangel, Russia.⁹ He returned on 14 November.¹⁰ The Municipal Archives of Amsterdam hold a report on the homeward-bound voyage.

On 5 October 1782 *Maria Johanna* set sail from the port of Archangel for Amsterdam. On 12 November the vessel arrived at Terschelling straits and took a pilot on board. By that time it had become clear that the bow rigging had been damaged. The weather deteriorated and the crew had difficulty keeping the ship clear from shallow waters. In the evening anchor was dropped to wait for the tempest to pass.



Image 4. Terschelling Straits, Vlie

The next day the crew was not able to haul in the anchor. The only option was to cut the anchor. The *Maria Johanna* sailed on and entered the Vlie.



Image 5. Amsterdam approach, Pampus

On the 14th some of the cargo was unloaded in three lighters. The vessel got stuck in the ice on the Pampus waterway on the approach to Amsterdam. The ice caused damage to the ship. More of the cargo was lightered and transported to Amsterdam. Soon after the arrival of *Maria Johanna* in Amsterdam the master observed damage to the cargo.¹¹

⁹ Diemer- of Watergraafsmeersche courant, 17-07-1782.

¹⁰ Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 19-11-1782.

¹¹ Municipal Archive - Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief 5061, inv.nr.2894, p.61, Archieven van de schout en schepenen, van de schepenen en van de subalterne rechtbanken, averijgrossen: nl-saa-31156333.

Verdict

During the time at sea anything could go wrong and result in damage. Ships endured all sorts of weather, including violent storms. Masts, sails and rigging could get damaged. Ships could ground, or end up on a beach or rocks. Leakage could cause damage to cargo or even loss of it. Damages were resolved through *Averij Grosse*, Gross Average (or General Average); a contribution made by the owners of a ship and its cargo, towards the loss sustained by the voluntary and necessary sacrifice of property for the common safety, in proportion to their respective interests.

In case damage to ship or cargo had been sustained, the master, along with some of the crew had their statement or deposition registered at a notary. This statement was known as 'scheepsverklaring'. This notarial act was an extended description of the voyage and the circumstances on board of the vessel. It was to prove that the requirements for a valid Gross Average were met: deliberate actions by master and crew to counter imminent danger, with the intention to prevent further damage or loss to ship, cargo and life.

In Amsterdam a court ruled over these particular matters. In the case of *Maria Johanna* the damage and court costs amounted to f 1960-18-12.¹² The total value of cargo and ship was f 15625. There was a damage-to-value ratio of 1/8. The court's verdict ("vonnis averij grosse") stated that all parties concerned were to pay in the ratio of 1/8th of the value of their cargo/ship. For example: the value of the cargo of Lodewijk Hovy & Son was f 1575, the court set their loss at f 197-13-4. For the owners of the ship this voyage was an expensive enterprise. Their ship had a value of f 8900, so their losses mounted just over f1100.

It was a matter of instinct capitalism that losses were to be cut to a minimum. The newspaper *Diemer- of Watergraafsmeersche courant* of 20 January 1783 announced the sale of damaged goods of Hovy & Son on the next day.



D. H. COETSE, J. LAMBERS, J. M. STOLTENKAMP, J. DE WARM en N. LAMBERS, Makelaars, zullen op MORGEN den 21 January 1782, 's avonds ten 5 uren, te Amsterdam in de Nes in de Brakke Grond Verkoopen: Een party van 140 Baalen beschadigd Moscovisch MAAN HAIR, gelost uit het Schip *de Maria Johanna*, Schipper *Pieter Tjallings Bonk*, van Arehangel; 146 Rollen JUGTEN, zo gezond als beschadigd, gelost uit het Schip van Schipper *Albert Barends*, van St. Petersburg; 2 Vaten en 2 Pakken BOKKE PARUIKE HAIR; Moscovische KAARSEN; 1 Baaltje Witte VOSSE VELLEN, en andere Goederen meer; leggende als nader by Notitie zal worden aangewezen.

Image 6. *Diemer- of Watergraafsmeersche courant*, 20 January 1783.

¹² Gulden, stuivers, penningen: coins of that era: guilder = 20 stuivers. 1 stuiver = 16 penning.

To Philadelphia

On 5 November 1783 the newspaper *Nederlandsche courant* reported the departure of *Maria Johanna* under the command of Pieter Tjallings Bonk from Vlieland straits to Philadelphia.



Image 7. *Nederlandsche courant*, 5 Nov. 1783

Muster Roll

Preparations for this voyage had begun months earlier on the 5th of August. As a final act before the vessel began the voyage the so-called muster roll was completed. A muster roll is a written, legally binding labour contract between the master and his crew, and usually valid until the end of the stated voyage. Both the rights and responsibilities of the master and the crew are specified in full detail, listing the everyday tasks of the crew but also the daily rations of food and drink crew members can expect and the wages they will earn on a weekly or monthly basis. The muster roll is a large pre-printed form containing a standard text with empty spaces where the name and nationality of the ship, its master and crew and its next destination were filled in. At the bottom of each document, and continuing on the reverse side, was the list of the mustered crew. Every member of the crew was mentioned with his full name, his position or rank while on board, his home address when from Amsterdam or the name of his home town when from outside Amsterdam, followed by the wages per week or month. A simple cross for a signature indicated the approval of the crewmember to the conditions on which he had embarked for the voyage ahead. There usually is no information in the document about the cargo the ship would be carrying or about its tonnage.

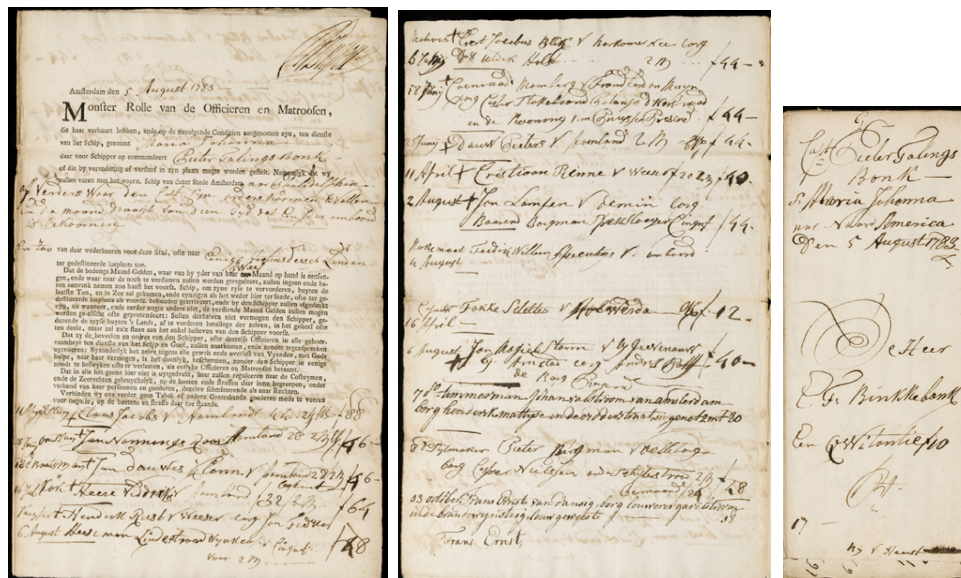


Image 8. The Muster Roll of 5 August 1783
Ship: *Maria Johanna*, Master: Pieter Tjallings Bonk.

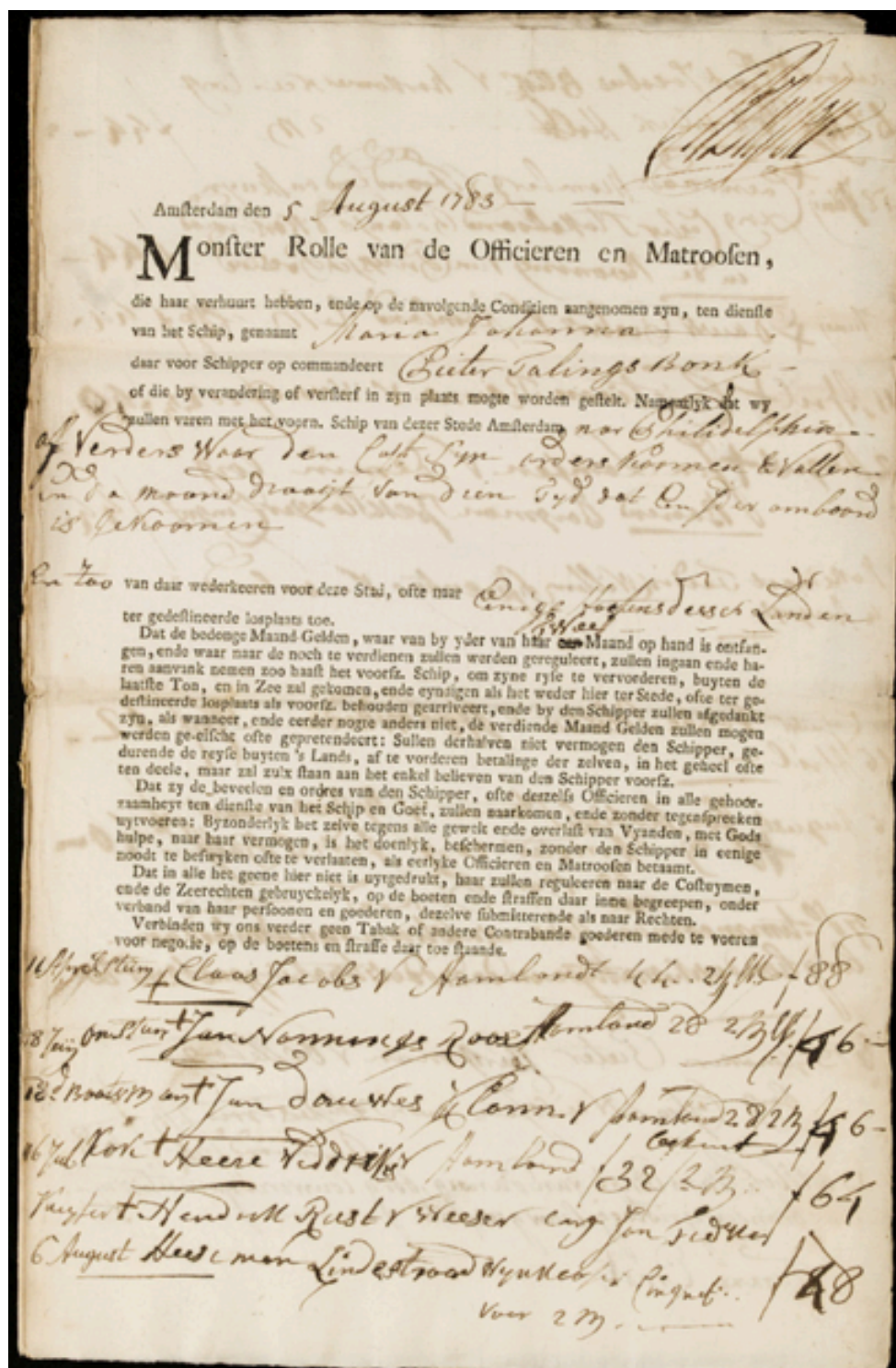


Image 9. First page of the Muster Roll of 5 August 1784.

Table 2. Muster Roll of 5 August 1783.¹³

Date	Rank	Name	From	Wages
11 April	Mate	Claas Jacobs	Ameland	f 88
18 June	2nd mate	Jan Nannes Roos	Ameland	f 46
18 June	Boatswain	Jan Douwes	Ameland	f 46
16 July	Cook	Heere Veddings	Ameland	f 64
		Hendrik Rust	Weese	
6 August		Heeseman Lindertzoon		f 48
6 June	Sailor	Gert Jacobus Blik	Hannover	f 44
18 June		Coenraad Momberg		f 44
25 June		Douwe Pieters	Ameland	f 44
11 April		Cristiaan Rinne	Weese	f 40
2 August		Jan Lanser		f 44
4 August	Assist. Cook	Teedink Willem Speenkens	van boord	
16 April		Fokke Scheltes	Amsterdam	f 12
6 August		Jan Magiel Storm	Holwerd	f 40
7 August	Carpenter	Johan Valstroom	Amsterdam	f 80
8 August	Sailmaker	Pieter Bergman	Aalborg	f 48
13 October		Frans Ernst	Danzig	f 38

The Muster Roll lists 17 crewmembers. Of one of the crew it is not certain that he was on board when the ship departed the Netherlands (assist. cook, at the end of the line is stated 'van boord', left ship). With Master Bonk the number on board would be 17 or 18. Heere Veddings is mentioned on the site of *Amelander Historie*¹⁴ as Heere Feddriks, he died in 1782 (!) "on the river of Filadelvia". Second mate Jan Nannes Roos survived the ordeal and returned to Ameland. He got married in 1787 and was christened in 1789. He passed away on 19 July 1804, in Hollum, a town on the island of Ameland. According to the Muster Roll Coenraad Momberg returned to the Netherlands on 1 June 1784 on board the vessel *Koning van Pruissen*. According to newspapers there were passengers on board. These are not mentioned on the Muster Roll.

¹³ Municipal Archive - Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief, Archief 5061, inv.nr.2894, p.61, Archieven van de schout en schepenen, van de schepenen en van de subalterne rechtbanken, averijgrossen: .SAA-A13014000079, 80. 81.

¹⁴ Dedicated to the history of the island of Ameland: <https://www.amelanderhistorie.nl>

Delaware

In the 18th Century Transatlantic voyages from Amsterdam to Philadelphia would normally average around eight to ten weeks depending on the time of year, the weather and sailing conditions. According to letters from New York, dated 16 February, Master P.S. Bonk was in the Delaware River, along with another vessel, probably that under command of Master Kelly. In the Delaware River ships laid stuck in the ice. The report ends with the remark “when the ice will melt, dangerous situations may occur. The winter was never so severe.”¹⁵

The frost had entirely frozen across the river. In February the bay was full of ice. According to reports four horses pulling a load crossed the Delaware. On the 6th of March the river flooded her banks, floating ice lodged and formed a dam- by which means the ground became overflowed, horses and cattle drowned.¹⁶ On 12 March navigation opened, having been closed since 26th of December.

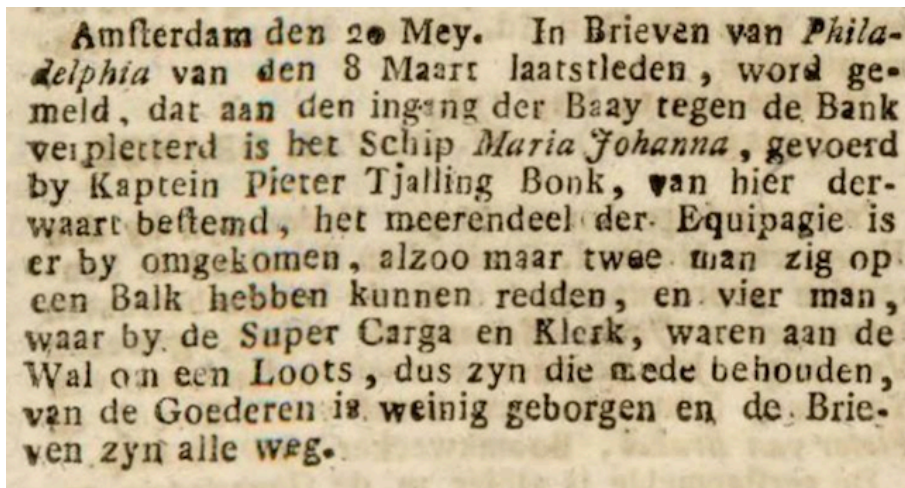


Image 10. Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 15 April 1784

The newspaper *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant* reported on 15 April 1784 from letters from Philadelphia dated on 8 March, that the *Maria Johanna* had been smashed to pieces at the entrance of the bay. Most of the crew had perished. Two men survived by holding on to debris. Four others had gone ashore earlier to arrange for a pilot. Of these, two were mentioned by their position on board: the supercargo and his clerk. Their names are not known.

¹⁵ Newspaper *Leydse courant*, 16 April 1784.

¹⁶ Newspaper *Leeuwarder courant*, 9 June 1784.

Archives

Earlier in this report a description is given on how damage to cargo and ships was dealt with in the aftermath [see **Verdict**]. In case a ship was lost, the master would try to get some reimbursement on his losses and start proceedings to get a ruling from the maritime court (“vonnis averij grosse”). In order to start such a procedure he would have to make a official statement at a notary’s office. In the archives in the Netherlands no official statements have been found on the last voyage of the *Maria Johanna* .

In case of the *Maria Johanna* it is very likely that at least two of the survivors -most likely the supercargo and the clerk - made a deposition before a notary or lawyer, perhaps in Philadelphia. That would be ‘common’ practise. These statements could also be given abroad, in any case as soon as possible after the incident had taken place.

The position of supercargo was a specific job. His responsibilities were to ensure the safe handling of the cargo while at sea and to negotiate the sale of the goods once the ship reached port.

However, there is no ruling of the maritime court on the *Maria Johanna* in the Municipal archives of Amsterdam. A deposition made abroad would usually have been taken into account by the court. There is not a trace of both. Furthermore, research in the Notary Archives - ‘Notariële archief’ - has not been successful in delivering a cargo list or freighters’ contract of the *Maria Johanna* in 1783/1784.

So far, the only information available on the cargo was found in the *United States Chronicle*. The newspaper reported on 8 April 1784 that there were over 2300 cases of Geneva.
